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Chapter 26

Comparisons Between Adventist Teachers in Australia, the Solomon Islands, North America, and Europe

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The chapters in this book provide an analysis of survey data collected from teachers in Adventist schools in the Australian Union Conference (AUC) and the Solomon Islands Mission (SIM). These surveys asked teachers about their perceptions of mission, some details about their age and education, as well as their beliefs and spiritual practices. They were collected in the territory of the South Pacific Division (SPD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as part of a research project that will eventually collect data from teachers in all 13 world Divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA Church). At the time of writing, data have been collected and analysed from the North American Division (NAD), the SPD, and the Trans European Division (TED). Some interesting comparisons between the data sets collected from these three Divisions are already emerging, and it seemed appropriate to include in this book a report that compares some of the survey data from the SPD with that from the NAD and TED. Given the differences that have already been observed between the AUC and SIM responses, and that this book is focussed on the SPD, data from the AUC and SIM have been reported separately.

A Report on Responses to Selected Survey Items for AUC, SIM, NAD, and TED

A selection of responses from the different Divisions to items relating to key demographic data and to religious practices and beliefs

are reported in Table 26.1. Data are presented for the AUC, SIM, NAD, and TED. An extra column is provided for the AUC and SIM that reports on the responses of the group who said, “Yes”, to the question, “Are you a Seventh-day Adventist?” and who also said that they attend church at least once a week (“AUC Wkly”; “SIM Wkly”). The reason for providing these extra columns is explained later in this chapter.

Table 26.1

Responses From the AUC, SIM, NAD, and TED Teachers to Selected Items From Survey

Division of SDA Church ¹	NAD Tot n=982 ²	TED Tot n=43	AUC Tot n=462	AUC Wkly n=300	SIM Wkly n=214	SIM Tot n=346
Demographics						
Average age	48 49%≥50	50	42	42	37.5	27 66%≤40
Proportion who have worked for SDA schools 10 or more years	71%	60%	51%	52%	48%	39%
Proportion bachelor's degree or higher/master's degree or higher	99%/56%	95%/58%	97%/24%	97%/25%	19%/5%	15%/1%
Proportion who state that they are Seventh-day Adventists	99.9%	95%	86%	[100%]	[100%]	99%
Proportion who strongly agreed that they serve the mission of the church through their work as teachers	90%	83%	84%	89%	78%	84%
Religious Practices and Beliefs: Percentage who ...						
Attend church worship services at least once a week	90%	98%	74%	[100%]	[100%]	60%
Report a positive commitment to the local and world SDA Church (most-frequently reported level of commitment: “very strong”)	96%	84%	80%	91%	91%	92%

Division of SDA Church ¹	NAD Tot n=982 ²	TED Tot n=43	AUC Tot n=462	AUC Wkly n=300	SIM Wkly n=214	SIM Tot n=346
Have held church office in last 12 months	65.4%	66.7%	36%	47%	54.5%	51.8%
Said that they had made a personal commitment to Jesus that was still important in their life	99%	95%	97%	100%	100%	98%
Pray at least once a day (outside of attending a religious service)	94%	83%	71%	81%	33%	30%
Read their Bible once a week or more often	88%	78%	68%	74%	65%	57%
Tithe at least 10% of their income	88%	75%	82%	91%	52%	52%
Strongly agree that they believe in a personal God who seeks a relationship with human beings	97%	98%	92%	94%	88%	85%
Strongly agree that they expect Jesus to return to earth a second time	96%	100%	90%	95%	97%	96%
Strongly agree that God created the world	98%	100%	95%	97%	96%	93%
Embrace wholeheartedly that all humanity is involved in a great controversy between Christ and the devil	93%	100%	84%	90%	38%	34%
Embrace wholeheartedly that the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath according to the Bible	95%	95%	88%	94%	59%	49%
Embrace wholeheartedly the Adventist Church's interpretation of end-time prophecies	72%	60%	56%	60%	50%	42%
Embrace wholeheartedly that Ellen G. White is an inspired messenger to the Adventist Church	84%	80%	64%	69%	60%	47%

Division of SDA Church ¹	NAD Tot n=982 ²	TED Tot n=43	AUC Tot n=462	AUC Wkly n=300	SIM Wkly n=214	SIM Tot n=346
Strongly agree they should abstain from illegal drugs	96%	100%	95%	96%	Data not available	
Strongly agree they should abstain from alcohol	77%	80%	68%	81%	Data not available	

Notes on Table 26.1

1. AUC = Australian Union Conference; SIM = Solomon Islands Mission; NAD = North American Division; TED = Trans European Division.
2. n = number of respondents 20 years of age and older who work for an Adventist institution who took the survey in the indicated Division of the SDA Church; Tot = those who were over 20 years of age and worked for a SDA institution; Wkly = those who said “yes” that they were a SDA and who attend church once a week or more.
3. Numbers in bold show a difference of at least 5% between the percentages in AUC Tot and AUC Wkly responses.

Table 26.1 is but a progress report on the research to date, representing as it does, data collected from only three of the 13 world Divisions of the SDA Church. Yet already, interesting patterns are emerging. For example, the age profiles reveal things of significance to administrators of the Adventist Church and of the Adventist education system (see Table B.9 in Appendix B). The average age of the NAD teacher is 48 years, and 49% of the NAD teachers are aged 50 years or more (Table 26.1). Fifty-six percent of them have master’s degrees or higher, and most of them have worked for the church school system for at least 10 years. From their age profile and their average age, one might expect that over the next 10 years, many of the teachers in the NAD will retire. This is well-known to the NAD school administration, but the survey data provide further evidence of the challenge that they will be facing in recruiting qualified and committed SDA teachers to replace those that are retiring. The ages of the teachers of the SIM show quite a different pattern. Their average age is 27, and 66% of them are under the age of 40. Only 15% of them have a bachelor’s qualification. Again, their age and qualification profiles are well known to the administrators of the SDA educational system in the SIM and the SPD. The survey data provide further evidence, though, that in the SIM the issue is upgrading the qualifications of the existing work force. By way of contrast, the age profile of the AUC teachers

shows good representation from each age group. 97% of them have a bachelor's qualification, and 24% a master's degree or higher.

Some of the items show little variance between the three Divisions. For example, nearly all the teachers from the NAD, SPD, and TED reported that "they had made a personal commitment to Jesus that was still important in their life". Almost all of them "strongly agree that they believe in a personal God who seeks a relationship with human beings"; strongly agree that "God created the world"; strongly agree that "they should abstain from illegal drugs"; and strongly agree that they "expect Jesus to return to earth a second time".

The data in Table 26.1 reveal some unexpected differences. Take, for example, the difference in the percentage of teachers in the SIM who pray at least once a day (30%) with the corresponding statistic for the AUC (71%), NAD (94%), and TED (83%). This difference has already been canvassed in Chapter 20, where it was also noted that the difference is statistically significant. It was also suggested that the wording of the question may have been directed at an aspect of prayer that is practised in more individualistic cultures. Group-orientation is a large part of Solomon Islands culture, and the considerable amount of time spent with their fellow-believers in reading scripture, in listening to sermons and devotional talks, and in communal prayer may mean that individuals feel less need for personal prayer than in the more individualistic cultures of AUC, NAD, and TED. This supposition finds support in the differences in the responses to Item 56b, in which respondents indicate how often they participate in prayer groups and Scripture study groups. Forty-five percent of SIM teachers attended prayer/study groups at least once a week, a proportion that goes up to 63% if one only considers those who attend church regularly (see Table 20.1 in Chapter 20). This might be compared with the percentage of AUC (32%), NAD (41%), and TED (43%) teachers who attend prayer/study groups at least once a week (see Table B.56b in Appendix B). The difference between the responses from AUC and SIM teachers concerning attendance at weekly prayer/study meetings is also statistically significant. While AUC teachers pray privately more often than do SIM teachers, SIM teachers attend significantly more communal prayer events than their AUC colleagues.

One other interesting feature of the data from the SIM surveys is the large difference in the average age of the total sample (27 years), with the average of those who attend worship services at least weekly (37.5 years). This is in contrast to the teachers in Australia, where the

average age of the total sample is the same as the average of those in the sample that attend an Adventist worship service at least weekly (42 years).

One small variation is worthy of note. A slightly higher percentage of Australian teachers who attend church once a week or more return 10% of their income as tithe than teachers in the NAD and TED. Tithe is tax-deductible in the NAD. This means that while many SDAs in the NAD attend worship services at more than one church location during any given month, they are careful to ensure that their tithe is directed to only one church location, so that it is all represented in a yearly report that is generated for taxation purposes (McIver, 2016, p. 37–40, 72–90). There is some variation between the different states in the USA, but the law in California is mirrored in many other state laws. Those working for an organisation (such as a church school) cannot have a donation deducted from their wages for that organisation (e.g., tithe to the SDA Church). Generally speaking, tithe is not tax-deductible in Australia. But there is one method of contributing tithe which has the effect of making it tax deductible, which is to contribute tithe as pre-tax salary sacrifice. This option is offered to teachers working for Adventist Schools Australia (ASA), and the convenience of contributing tithe in this manner looks to be a likely explanation for the slightly larger percentage of AUC teachers who attend church regularly and who tithe 10% of their income compared to teachers in the NAD and TED.

Among other things, Table 26.1 reveals the successful outcome of the long-term commitment that the Adventist Church has in the three Divisions to the goal of ensuring a well-educated and prepared workforce to teach in Adventist schools. Over 95% of teachers in the AUC, NAD, and TED have bachelor's degrees, and over half of the NAD and TED teachers have master's degrees. The high percentages of teachers who have worked for the SDA school system for 10 or more years reveals the teachers' personal long-term commitment to the church-sponsored education and the beliefs of the church.

Differences in Percentage of Teachers Who Attend Church Weekly and Who Pray Daily

Several items in Table 26.1 reveal that Adventist teachers in all the regions surveyed have exemplary personal religious lives when measured by their church attendance and prayer life. For example, a much larger percentage of teachers in the AUC attend church at

least once a month than do other Australians (94% vs. 19%; cf. Table B.18 and Reid, 2020a, p. 2). The percentage of teachers in the AUC who pray at least once a week is again much greater than is true for other Australians (94.5% vs. 21%; cf. Table B.56 and Reid, 2020a, p. 4). A similar comparison may be made for teachers in the NAD. While 47% of the North American population identify themselves as Christians (Pew, 2015, p. 13), only 23% attend a church or synagogue on any given week (Duffin, 2020). This compares to the 90% of NAD teachers who report that they attend church once a week or more (Table 26.1; Table B.18). Yet if one compares the percentage of NAD teachers who attend church at least weekly with the number of AUC teachers who do so, the percentage of NAD teachers is markedly higher (90% vs. 74%; Table 26.1). This difference is but one example of a general pattern observable in Table 26.1, which is that many Australian teachers report somewhat lower percentages in measures of religious practice than their NAD and TED counterparts. These include practices such as reading their Bibles once a week or more, praying at least once a day, and attending church worship services at least once a week. As David Trim (Director of Archives, Statistics, and Research, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the body that funded and oversaw the research) pointed out to me in a private communication soon after I put these figures together and shared them with him, the pattern of differences cries out for an explanation.

I spent some time analysing the results to see if there was an explanation that was inherent in the data. One thing struck me nearly immediately. There were noticeably different percentages of Australian and North American teachers who answered, “Yes”, to the question, “Are you a Seventh-day Adventist?” This number was 99.9% in the NAD, and 86% in the AUC. I followed this up by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to choose the subset of the teachers who said “Yes” to being a SDA, and generated the report that I had been using for the figures in Table 26.1. The relevant numbers for AUC teachers moved, but not much. I tried two other variations: those who said that they were Adventists as well as being official members of the church; and those who said they were Adventists and attended church once a week or more. Of the three sets of figures, it was those associated with participants who stated that they were a SDA and who attended church at least weekly who had a pattern of church attendance, daily prayer, etc. that was most like the teachers in the NAD.

Given the potentially sensitive nature of this finding, I thought I should reach out to the AUC and SPD Directors of Education to alert them of it, and to get their advice on how best to present it. Hence, on 9 October 2020, I convened a meeting between myself, David McClintock (Director of Education, SPD), Daryl Murdoch (Director of Education, AUC), Peter Kilgour (acting Dean of Education, Business, and Science, Avondale University College) and Sherene Hattingh (Avondale University College). I presented a table to them that examined the items listed in Table 26.1, along with columns showing the results of the various filters I had been trying out; *viz.* (i) those AUC teachers who said that they were Seventh-day Adventists, (ii) those who said they were Adventists and also said that they were official church members; and (iii) those who said they were Adventists who also attended church at least once a week. As already mentioned, it was the group who said that they were Seventh-day Adventists and who attended church at least once a week that had a profile closest to those of the NAD and TED teachers, at least in practices of personal piety.

What struck me about the meeting between David, Daryl, Peter, Sherene and myself is that all of us present (including the Division and Union Directors of Education) thought that these data should be reported and analysed because what is revealed is of importance to the Church's understanding of its education system. We also spent time thinking about what made Australian teachers different from their North American and Trans-European colleagues. Among the differences canvassed in the discussion, we noted that the AUC teachers' attitudes to the SDA Church organisation reflect something of the wider Australian culture and indeed is typical of the wider Australian Adventist Church. We also noted that while teachers in Adventist schools have a very strong personal spirituality, some of them have various levels of disengagement with the official Seventh-day Adventist Church. Given that many of them are not Seventh-day Adventists, this is unremarkable. We talked together about why, despite the intention to staff Adventist schools with only committed Seventh-day Adventist teachers, a significant percentage of those working in the Adventist school system were not personally associated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church (see discussion below). Furthermore, we noted that the Australian Adventist schools have a stance in regard to the wider community that is different from that found in many of the

American Adventist schools. Each of these themes will be explored below, with an additional section on the differences in the percentages of the total “population” of teachers in the SPD, NAD, and TED that undertook the surveys.

Percentage of Teachers Who Say “Yes, I am a Seventh-day Adventist”

Several factors contribute to the larger percentage of teachers not affiliated with the SDA Church in the AUC when compared to the teachers in the NAD. This has come about despite the policy of the AUC to hire teachers from a Seventh-day Adventist background for Adventist schools. In part, this policy reads,

In order to ensure that the objectives of Adventist schools are achieved and the ethos of Adventist schools is maintained, all Adventist schools within the Australian Union Conference will adopt employment practices that ensure:

- a) Only baptised and practicing Adventists who understand, live and reflect the ethos of Adventist schools be engaged as school leaders (Principal, Deputy Principal or Head of School), chaplains, specialist Biblical Studies teachers or in other roles identified by the school as only being capable of being undertaken by Adventists;
- b) Only baptised Adventists or adherents of Christian denominations with doctrines, tenets and beliefs comparable with those of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who demonstrate the ability to understand and reflect the ethos of Adventist schools are engaged in other staff roles, teaching and non-teaching, within the school. It is recognised that in most situations it is preferable that baptised and practising Adventists be appointed given the greater ability to understand, live and reflect the ethos of Adventist schools.

It is to be noted that the above statement of preferential employment does not:

- restrict schools from employing casual relief teachers who do not meet the above criteria for contractual, part-time or full-time employment;
- impact existing staff who may not meet this criterion. These staff are able to continue in their existing roles subject to meeting the requirements of their role description. (ASA, 2015, 3.310)

This type of selective hiring practice is allowed under Australian law. For example, there are important exemptions in Australian law for “Educational institutions established for religious purposes”. One of the most important of these is found in the “Sex Discrimination

Act of 1984” as emended, which includes an entire section for such educational institutions. Section 38 of this law reads as follows:

Educational institutions established for religious purposes

(1) Nothing in paragraph 14(1)(a) or (b) or 14(2)(c) renders it unlawful for a person to discriminate against another person on the ground of the other person’s sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status or pregnancy in connection with employment as a member of the staff of an educational institution that is conducted in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of a particular religion or creed, if the first-mentioned person so discriminates in good faith in order to avoid injury to the religious susceptibilities of adherents of that religion or creed.

Subsections (2) and (3) use very similar language to allow educational institutions to discriminate in employment of subcontractors:

Provision of education or training by an educational institution that is conducted in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of a particular religion or creed, if the first-mentioned person so discriminates in good faith in order to avoid injury to the religious susceptibilities of adherents of that religion or creed. (Sex Discrimination Act 1984, 47; cf. Age Discrimination Act, section 35, p. 31)

These and other provisions in Australian law that allow educational institutions to discriminate on the basis of religious tenets are currently under vigorous debate, as Sarah Moulds notes:

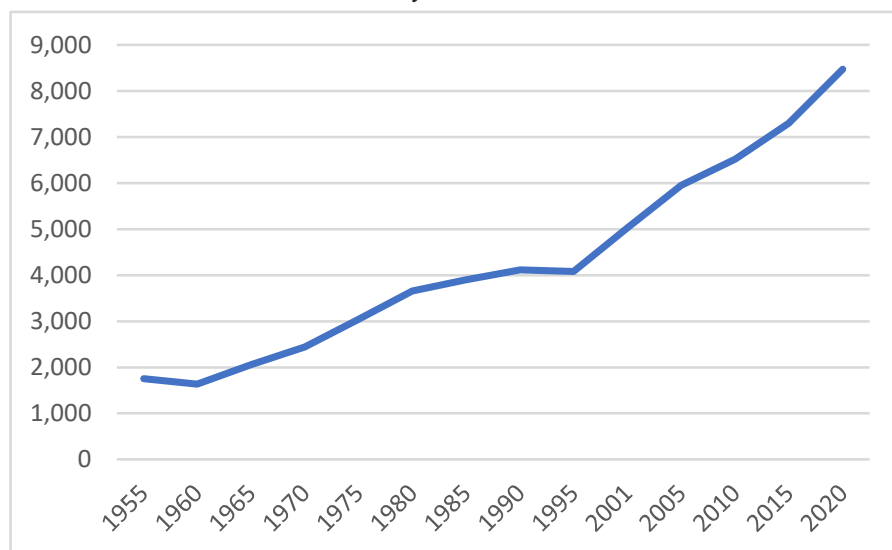
Australia is in the midst of an impassioned debate about how to appropriately protect the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and non-binary Australians whilst also preserving the freedoms of religious bodies and religious individuals to express their religious beliefs. This debate, which took centre stage in the push for marriage equality over the past decade, has been reignited by discussions at the Commonwealth level to introduce new legal protections against religious discrimination and reform the existing anti-discrimination laws. (Moulds, 2020, p. 112; cf. Barker, 2019; Arnold-Moore, 2018; and Benson, 2018)

While still under debate, it is currently legal to discriminate positively in choosing Seventh-day Adventists when hiring teachers to work in Adventist schools in Australia, and has been so since Adventist schools began operating in the 1890s. Hence, the reason for the larger number of non-SDAs working in Adventist schools in the AUC when compared to the NAD is not found in employment law.

But there are two factors that are important: (1) the expansion of the reach of Adventist schools into the community, together with (2) the almost static pool of children of Adventist parents who wish to attend Adventist schools.

The Adventist school system in Australia has been steadily growing since the 1960s. One of the principal contributors to the growth of the Adventist school system in the last two decades is identified in Chapter 6 of this book, entitled “Mission of Adventist Schools with a Changing Clientele”. In this chapter, Daryl Murdoch recounts the significant changes that took place in the Adventist education system in the AUC after two education summit meetings called by the SPD, which took place in 1996 and 1997, led to a change in perspective. According to Murdoch, “Up until the 1980s Adventist schools were perceived as existing primarily to serve the needs of Adventist families only”. This was reflected in the policy that was in place at least as far back as the early 1980s, during which time Adventist schools strictly enforced a policy that limited the percentage of students from a non-SDA background in the student population to 25%. But this limitation was removed as a result of the education summits that took place in 1996 and 1997 (in other words, by the time ASA began operation in 2001) (J. Carter, personal communication, 7 December 2020). As Murdoch explains in Chapter 6, with the removal of the limit on the number of students that Adventist schools could take from a non-SDA background, Adventist schools in the AUC now “had the opportunity to evangelise in the broader community by offering quality education to all who were willing to respect our Adventist worldview and associated values” (Murdoch, 2020). The result of the expansion of the mission of the Adventist school system in the AUC has been a continuous expansion of student numbers and in the number of staff employed. In 2000, the year the AUC was established (from the Trans Australian Union and part of the Trans Tasman Union), there were 11,043 students in Adventist schools in the AUC taught by 811 teachers (Cooper, 2016, p. 104, 114). By 2020, these numbers had grown to 14,930 students and 1,053 teachers (Bapty, 2020, p. 4, 12).

The expansion of student numbers in AUC schools is apparent in Figure 26.1, which shows the numbers of students attending primary schools in the Conferences that now make up the AUC.

Figure 26.1*Enrolment in Adventist Primary Schools in Australia, 1955–2020*

Notes on Figure 26.1:

1. The enrolment numbers for 1955 through 1995 were derived from the Conference-level numbers in the annual report published by the South Pacific Division as a supplement to the [SPD] *Record*. Before 2001, the Conferences that make up the current AUC were distributed across two Unions: the Trans-Commonwealth Union Conference (later the Trans-Australia Union Conference) and the Trans Tasman Union Conference. Numbers prior to 1955 have not been reported. The numbers on the statistical report appear to combine primary, secondary, and tertiary student numbers, not primary students alone.
2. The numbers from 2001 to 2020 come from the yearly statistical summary produced by Adventist Schools Australia, which kindly made them available to the author.

Figure 26.1 reveals that the number of students in Adventist primary schools has been growing steadily since the 1960s (with a slower growth rate between 1980 and 1995). The increase in numbers of primary-aged students has been paralleled by an increase in the number of secondary students (e.g., see Table 2.2 in Chapter 2).

The source of the increasing number of student enrolments is revealed in another set of statistics reported by ASA, which includes in its statistical reports the number of students from SDA and non-SDA home backgrounds. By 2016, when most of the data reported in this book had been collected, 8,782 students attending schools in the AUC out of a total student number of 12,808 students (or 69%)

were from a non-SDA background. In 2020, the enrolments included 10,880 students from a non-SDA background out of a total of 14,930 students (or 73%). The number of students from an Adventist background rose from 4,026 to 4,050 during the same period (Bapty, 2020, p. 6). ASA reports commenced in 2001, and Table 26.2 lists the numbers of students from SDA and non-SDA home backgrounds for the years 2001 to 2019, together with the percentage of students who came from a non-SDA background.

Table 26.2

Home Background of Students in AUC Primary and Secondary Schools

Year	SDA	Non-SDA	Total Enrolment	%Non-SDA
2001	4,305	3,908	8,213	48%
2003	3,943	4,687	8,630	54%
2005	4,005	5,612	9,617	58%
2007	4,005	5,612	9,617	58%
2009	3,831	6,965	10,796	65%
2011	3,800	7,413	11,213	66%
2013	3,865	8,014	11,879	67%
2015	4,087	8,490	12,577	68%
2017	3,838	9,331	13,169	71%
2019	3,918	10,414	14,332	73%

Figure 26.2 provides a graph of the numbers reported in Table 26.2, and shows clearly the overall trends in the student numbers from each background. The number of students from an Adventist background has remained essentially static since 2001, while the number of students from a non-SDA background has more than doubled over the same time period. The net result is that the proportion of students from a non-SDA background rose from 48% to 73% over the time period represented in the graph.

Figure 26.2

Home Background of Students in AUC Primary and Secondary Schools

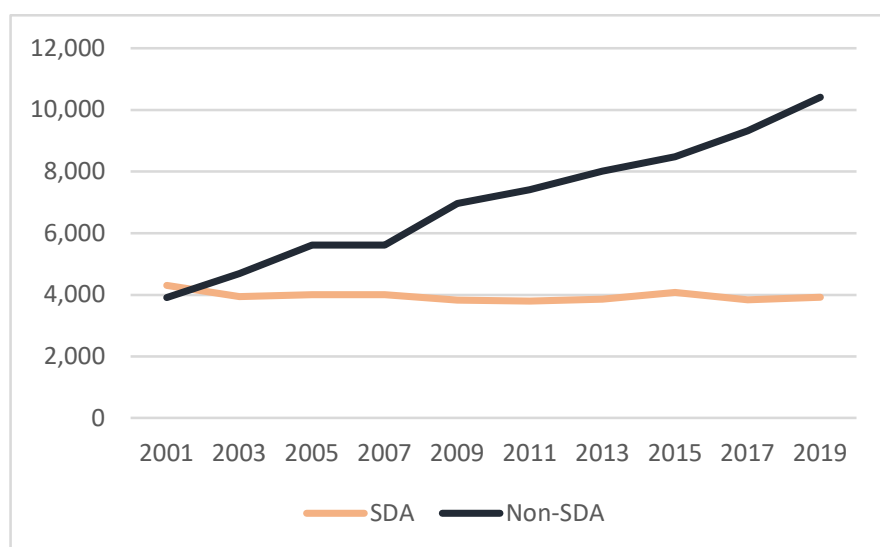
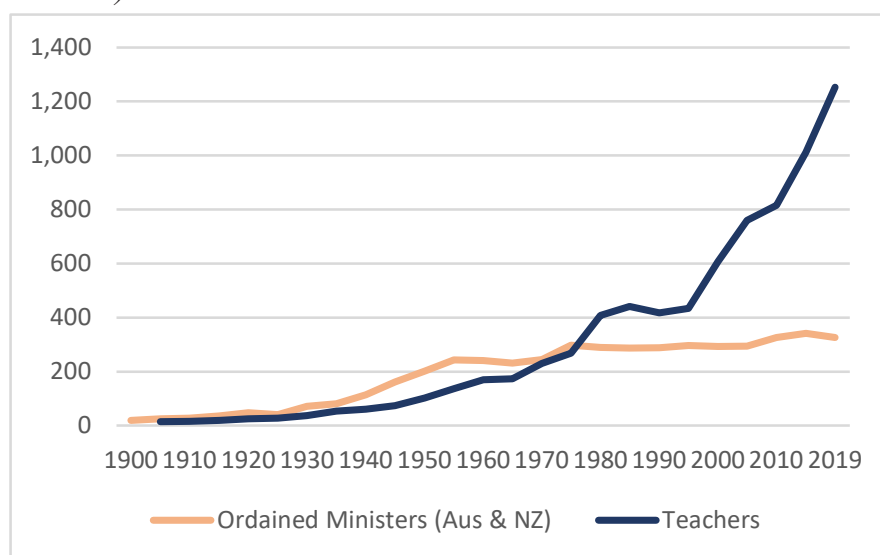


Figure 26.1 and Table 26.2 demonstrate the continuous expansion of the numbers of students in the AUC schools. There has been a corresponding increase in the number of teachers employed to teach these students. Figure 26.3 shows the number of teachers and ordained ministers working in churches, schools, and other Adventist institutions in Australia and New Zealand from 1901 to 2015.

Figure 26.3

Number of Teachers and Ordained Ministers (Australia and New Zealand)



Notes on Figure 26.3:

1. The expansion in the number of teachers compared to ministers has been facilitated by the increasing financial underwriting by the state and commonwealth governments in Australia, and the New Zealand government. In 2017, teachers' wages came almost entirely from government funding and student fees (see Chapter 7 "Australian Government Funding in Australian Independent Schools").
2. The figures from 1900 to 2000 have been derived from the yearly statistical reports published by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists by combining numbers from the TTUC and TCUC/TAUC.
3. The figures from 2005 and 2010 have been derived from the statistical reports of the SPD published yearly in the *Australian Record*.
4. The figures from 2015 and 2019 have been derived from statistics kindly provided by the SPD, who no longer publish a yearly statistical report in the *Australian Record*. At the time of writing, the 2020 figure for the number of teachers was available from Adventist Schools Australia, but not the number of ordained ministers from the SPD, which reports this number in 2021.
5. A graph very similar to this has previously appeared in McIver (2018), although the data used to generate this graph has been corrected and extended according to new data made available by the SPD. The 2018 article contains a discussion of the balancing of resources between the school system and other parts of the SDA Church.

It has proved to be a challenge to find Adventist teachers to staff Adventist schools in the AUC, particularly in some curriculum areas and in regions outside of the state capital cities. This might be illustrated by the number of primary teachers studying at Avondale College of Higher Education (as it was in 2016, and now Avondale University College). In 2017, in my then role of Vice President (Academic and Research), I had written to Daryl Murdoch inquiring as to whether SPD had any projections on the number of primary teachers that Adventist Schools Australia would need over the next few years. His response included the following:

Firstly we looked back to see the trends over time. What is clear is that we are employing the overwhelming majority of primary graduates [from Avondale College of Higher Education] who are committed to our ethos and values and who are prepared to be somewhat flexible in relation to where they are prepared to accept employment. The number of primary graduates employed each year has varied from year to year. On average we are looking at about 15–20 primary graduates from Avondale College being employed in ASA schools each year for the past 10–12 years. This number represents the majority of suitable and portable graduates.

As we look at future enrolments in ASA schools we note that we will be requiring an additional 85 new teachers between now and 2020. Well over half of these needed teachers will be primary teachers as

the demographic bulge coming through our population is in the 4–8 year old domain.

In summary, I would suggest that ASA could employ 30–40 Avondale primary graduates each year (Daryl Murdoch, personal communication, 4 July 2017).

In 2017, 44 students entered the first year of one of four degrees offered by Avondale University College (Avondale) that would prepare them to work as teachers in a primary school. Not all of those students would eventually graduate, nor were they all from a SDA background. In the previous year, only 24 students had entered programs that would prepare them to work as primary teachers. There is clearly a shortfall of Avondale-trained primary teachers for Adventist schools in the AUC, which will be filled only partially by SDA primary teachers who have trained at institutions other than Avondale. Historically, there have been much larger cohorts of primary education students entering Avondale. There are a number of reasons for the falling student numbers undertaking primary education, not least the government policy of increasing the minimum entry requirements and the government's constant reference to an oversupply of primary teachers (e.g., Singhal, 2018). Be this as it may, while at one stage Avondale was providing a good supply of trained primary teachers for the schools in the AUC, students are not coming to study primary teaching at Avondale in numbers sufficient to provide staff for the Adventist schools in the AUC.

The shortfall in the supply of trained primary teachers who are Adventists is but one of several staffing issues that occupy the minds of administrators of the Adventist educational system in the AUC. For example, finding Adventist teachers qualified to teach all the different specialist subjects in high school has long been a challenge. The result is that the Adventist schools in the AUC often employ Christian teachers who are sympathetic to the ethos of the Adventist School system, but who are not necessarily practising members of the SDA Church. They are often employed on short-term contracts, but these frequently turn into permanent positions after a period of time. Employment law in Australia has undergone several major changes. For a time, if a teacher had been on a one-year teaching contract for a certain number of years, the law required that they be offered full-time positions if they were teaching a full load, or even regularly teaching the same part-time load. In this manner, the number of non-SDAs working in the school system has grown over the years. According

to AUC records, in 2016 the number of primary teachers from a non-SDA background was 48 (11% of the 435 teachers), and 71(15%) of 483 secondary teachers. By 2020 this number had increased to 91 out of 407 primary teachers (18%), and 100 out of 555 secondary teachers (18%) (Bapty, 2020, p. 13–14).

There are differences between Adventist schools in the AUC and the NAD in their student and staff populations. Within the NAD, all but one of the survey respondents reported that they were a SDA (vs. 82% in the AUC). While I have no comparative data from the NAD about the number of students in Adventist schools that do not come from a SDA home, my strong impression is that most of the students in the Adventist schools in the NAD come from homes having a SDA background. This may not be so definitely the case in the larger schools but would be true of the great majority of NAD elementary and secondary schools. The mission of Adventist schools in the NAD is focused on evangelism of the children of Adventist parents. Larry Blackmer, NAD Vice President for Education (2002–2018), states it this way:

The reason the Adventist church administration has committed such resources toward Adventist PK–12 education is that they believe that every child deserves a robust, excellent academic experience, within a safe, spiritual Adventist environment. (Blackmer, 2019, p. 34)

By way of contrast, the scope of mission of the Adventist schools in the AUC includes students whose parents are Adventists as well as those with parents who are not. Adventist Schools Australia has been successful in attracting children from non-SDA families to attend their schools. So far, the majority of the teachers in their schools have had a SDA background. The Church is fully aware, though, that strenuous efforts need to be given to keeping the Adventist character of the education delivered by the schools in the AUC, and a significant part of that effort must be directed to recruiting committed Adventist teachers to work in the schools in the AUC.

Initiatives that have been taken at Division and Union level to make teachers from non-SDA backgrounds familiar with the ethos of the Adventist school system and that of the wider SDA Church have been described in earlier chapters of this book by David McClintock and Daryl Murdoch. These include highlighting distinctive Adventist beliefs and concepts of mission at professional meetings, as well as the development of a model of community faith and learning (Murdoch, 2020a; cf. McClintock, 2020). AUC schools have also built up the

number and quality of chaplains appointed to Adventist schools. Murdoch reports that in 2020 there were over 80 chaplains working in Adventist schools in the AUC, and notes that the ABIDE spiritual development resource for school leadership and chaplains is available for use to enhance staff connection with Christ (D. Murdoch, personal communication via email, received 30 Nov 2020).

Attitudes to Church Authority in Australia Compared to the United States

The *ad hoc* group (described earlier in the chapter) that met to discuss potential reasons for the differences discernible between the religious practices of the teachers from the AUC and the NAD pointed to the influence of the wider Australian culture as a possible partial explanation. One key difference between the two cultures may be observed in Table 26.3, which reports the confidence that Australians and North Americans have in the institutions of church, education, and government.

Table 26.3

*Australian and American Confidence in the Church/Education/
Government*

	Church		Education/public schools		Parliament/Congress	
Year	AUS	USA	AUS	USA	AUS	USA
1983	33%	62%	42%	39%	21%	28%
1998	29%	59%	39%	37%	21%	28%
2009	21%	52%	35%	38%	14%	17%
2018	12%	38%	33%	29%	7%	11%

Notes:

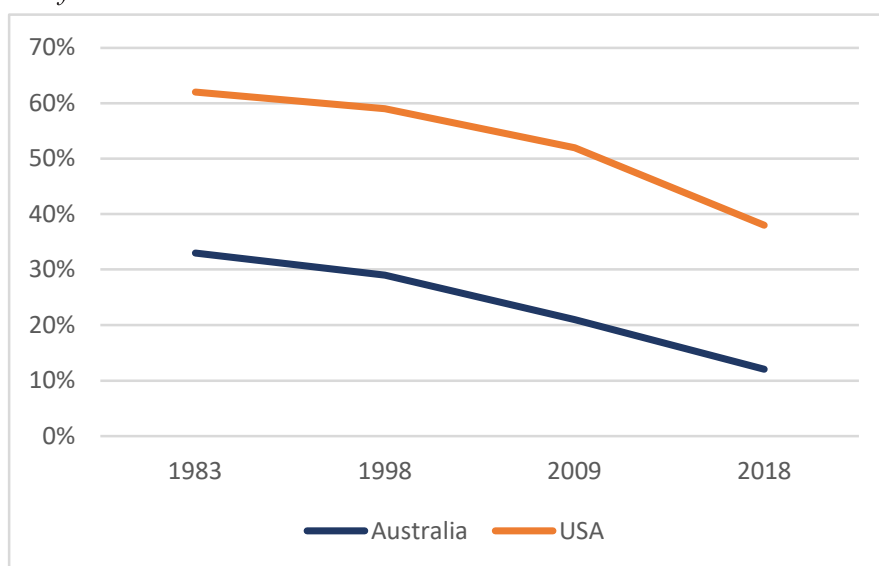
1. The percentage figures in Table 26.3 are derived from Reid, 2020b, p. 11 and Gallup, 2020. Participants in the *Australian Survey of Social Attitudes* were asked “How much confidence do you have in ...”, and the responses of “Complete confidence/A great deal of confidence” are combined in the figures of Table 26.3. In the Gallup poll, survey participants were asked, “Now I am going to read you a list of institutions in American society. Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in each one – a great deal, quite a lot, some or very little?” The figures for the USA reported in Table 26.3 combine the percentage responses for “a great deal/quite a lot”.
2. AUS = Australia

One may observe from Table 26.3 that the levels of confidence expressed by both Australians and Americans in government and

educational institutions are not dissimilar. But attitudes to church and religious organisations are dramatically different between the two countries. Australians have consistently been much less confident in the church as an institution, as may be seen in Figure 26.4.

Figure 26.4

Confidence in Church in Australia and North America



The culture of a country with a population of more than 25 million inhabitants (in 2020) cannot be easily placed into one category. But there is widely recognised Australian stereotype. Tony Moore, for example, has said, “Any Australian patriotism should be, first and foremost, based on taking the piss, on laughing, not just at oneself but at the powerful, whether upper-class Brits or the PM himself” (Moore, 2007, p. 44). Paul Hogan, Barry Humphries and other comedians have built long and successful careers by drawing upon this underlying current of larrikinism in the Australian psyche.

“Larrikin” is a word often used by Australians of themselves, in a deprecating but semi-proud manner (e.g., Thompson, 2007). Greg Hainge and Alistair Rolls note that the definition of the word has changed over the years. They say,

When we use the term “larrikin” we do not wish to invoke the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sense of this word that originally designated a hoodlum or a lout but, rather, its later usage in which it refers to “a person who acts with apparent disregard for social or political conventions”. (Hainge & Rolls, 2014, p. 271; the citation in quotation marks is from the *Oxford Modern Australian Dictionary*)

It would be an oversimplification to state that “larrikin” is the best description of a typical Australian (see Chapter 8 for a more nuanced presentation of the Australian religious culture). In fact, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the typical Australian is a 38-year-old married woman of European descent who has two children, and has finished year 12 at high school (ABS, 2017). But given the cultural diversity within Australia, even the statistically “average” Australian can be misleading.

Seventh-day Adventists, for example, belong to a distinct Australian subculture that rejects the consumption of alcohol. In historic times (and still today), those that advocated against the drinking of alcohol were described as wowsers, and their attitude as wowserism (Glover, 2017; Room, 2010). Adventists were not the only voices in Australia urging against smoking and drinking and advocating a temperate lifestyle. Within some of the Christian denominations in Australia one can discern a general concern for holiness, expressed by an abstemious lifestyle (O’Brien, 2010). Furthermore, there are other factors in Australian society that tend to build up national unity and patriotism, notable among which is the remembrance of the landing of the combined Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) on the Gallipoli peninsula in World War I on 25 April 1915, called ANZAC day. Enqi Weng and Anna Halafoff comment that, “It is interesting to note that the current Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, named ANZAC Day as Australia’s ‘most sacred day’ as a unifying message to all Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic” (Weng & Halafoff, 2020, p. 12; cf. Drozdowski, 2016). Public patriotism is on display at ANZAC day parades, although gambling and drinking are also traditional ways to celebrate it. Australian culture, as might be expected, is multifaceted. Yet underlying this diversity is a widespread discomfort with organised religion, and a growing disenchantment with the organs of government (Evans, Halupka & Stoker, 2019).

The proportion of Australians who identify themselves as Christian on a census has been steadily declining for many years (Hughes, 2017), and Australians are attending religious services less frequently than hitherto (Reid, 2020a). About a quarter of the Australian population describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious” (Hughes, 2019). As already noted in Table 26.3, the confidence Australians felt in churches and religious organisations dropped from the 33% who in 1983 expressed complete confidence or a great deal of confidence in them, to 12% in 2018 (Reid, 2020b).

Teachers in Adventist schools in the AUC are markedly different from wider Australian society in the percentage that attend church at least once a month (94% vs. 19%; *cf.* Table B.18 and Reid, 2020a, p. 2), and who pray at least once a week (94.5% vs. 21%; *cf.* Table B.56 and Reid, 2020a, p. 4). One might expect that they might be different from their culture in other ways. For example, it is possible that their attitudes may *not* match the wider Australian culture in its suspicion of churches and of other authorities. Possible, but unlikely! These teachers do live in Australia, and it is inevitable that some of the attitudes of their wider culture will resonate with them. While not all larrikins, many Australian SDAs would share a wry appreciation of the larrikins around them.

None of this is to say that the decline in confidence in the church and religious organisations is unique to Australia. Table 26.3 documents that there has also been a decline among North Americans in their confidence in the church. Nevertheless, when compared to the North American public, Australians have a dramatically lower trust in the church. How much is this difference in attitude to the church reflected in the items reported in Table 26.1? The answer is hard to determine, but it seems reasonable to conclude that it is a contributing factor to the differences observed between the AUC and NAD responses.

Different Participation Rates

The challenges of obtaining representative data in survey research are well known (e.g., Thompson, 2012, p. 91–197; Kish, 1965). Ideally, of course, one would have survey responses from the whole population being studied (in this case, all the teachers in Adventist schools in Australia, North America, and the Trans European Division). In practice, though, it is extremely rare to have a 100% return-rate of surveys. The larger the percentage of the population that returns a survey, the more likely are the responses to represent the whole population. There are techniques available to deliberately choose representative samples of the population, trying to match the sample against the profile of age, education, etc. in the whole population.

Given that the total number of AUC teachers available to respond to the survey was 796 (see Table 9.1), a sub-sample of the AUC teachers had the potential to return surveys in numbers too small for good results. Thus the aim of the research team chose was to seek survey responses from as large a percentage of the population of teachers in

the AUC as possible. The end result of data collection in the AUC was surveys from 519 AUC teachers (or 65% of the potential participants).

A variety of factors meant that it has proved challenging to work out the percentage of potential participants in the NAD that filled in a survey (see discussion in McIver, 2019, p. 79–80, 87–90). The participation rate in the NAD, while very good for the conditions under which the survey was conducted, was, nevertheless, much lower than it was in the AUC. As a result, those among the NAD teachers who participated in the survey were likely to be more helpful and mission-focussed than the wider group. Surveys are notorious for over-sampling those who have a higher-than-average trust in public organisations (the Church in this case), and participants are likely to over-report positive things about themselves. One only has to think of the extensive surveying that took place before the 2016 and 2020 US elections to see examples of over-representation of those who had a higher level of trust, and those who were likely to respond in the way that they imagined the pollsters would prefer (Kennedy, 2018; Page, 2020).

We conclude, then, that because the proportion of NAD teachers who took the survey may have been skewed toward those who were most willing to help, it is likely that the data collected from the NAD were biased towards positive attitudes to the church and its education system than surveys collected from AUC teachers. Does this mean that the data are therefore worthless because they are biased? This is not likely to be the case. All samples have an inherent bias, and much of the planning of the protocol adopted by a researcher is directed to minimise or at least account for the inevitable bias. Furthermore, because those that do not participate in the survey are highly likely to include a disproportionate percentage of those who are suspicious of the authority running the survey, or have particularly negative attitudes towards it, any sample (which by definition constitutes of less than 100% of the population) is going to have a greater or lesser degree of bias, often a positive bias. But the sample nevertheless *does* represent the underlying population. For example, if only 10% of the population prayed daily, almost any sample will show a low percentage of participants praying. Given that 71% of AUC teachers reported that they prayed once a day or more, it is just *not* possible for only a small percentage of the underlying population of AUC teachers to do so. This is especially true of the AUC teachers, given

that a larger percentage of them completed the survey when compared to the teachers in the NAD and TED. But even for the NAD and TED samples, given that 94% and 83% of participants (respectively) reported that they prayed at least once a day, it can be nearly guaranteed that the underlying population prays frequently. One can even use statistics to work out how large the possibility of error is. There is one way, though, in which the smaller percentage of potential participants that took the survey in the NAD and TED is important, and that is in reaching conclusions from the usually small variations in the percentages of those following practices of personal spirituality that can be observed in the comparison between the AUC, SIM, NAD and TED, particularly when one compares the group of AUC teachers that attend an Adventist Church at least weekly. The point is this: some of the smaller percentage differences observable in Table 26.1 may reflect underlying differences in the whole population of teachers, but equally they may represent the kind of random variation that comes with sample bias. The differences are worth noting, but care should be taken in drawing conclusions from any but larger differences (e.g., differences of at least 5%).

Responses From AUC Teachers Who Stated, “I am a Seventh-day Adventist” and Who Attend Church at Least Weekly, Compared to NAD Teachers

Between them, the three factors just considered (the number of non-SDA teachers in the AUC sample, the Australian culture, and the proportionately smaller percentage of the teachers in the NAD and TED that completed the sample) could explain much of the variation between the percentages of AUC teachers who self-report that they regularly attend church, study their Bibles, and pray regularly and the same items self-reported by teachers in the NAD and TED.

Table 26.1, together with most of the tables in this book that report AUC and SIM data, includes a column labelled “AUC Wkly”. This column reports responses of those that answered “Yes”, to Question 17, “Are you a Seventh-day Adventist?” and who indicated in their answers to Question 18 (“Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?”) that they attended at least once a week or more. The participants who fulfilled both of these criteria are most like the NAD and TED teachers who reported that they are SDAs and attend church regularly (99.9% and 95% respectively

said that were SDAs, and 90% and 98% attended church once a week or more; see Table 26.1). It is noteworthy that the responses shown in the “AUC: Yes SDA; Attend Weekly” column are much closer to those reported in the NAD and TED columns than the column headed “AUC Tot”.

Open-ended Responses to “What should be the mission of my school?” (AUC, SIM, NAD and TED)

The first question on the survey was an open-ended question in which participants were asked to respond to the statement: “I work at a Church-connected organisation. If I were asked what the mission of my organisation should be, I would say: ...” These responses have been analysed by Sherene Hattingh for the SPD (AUC and SIM), the NAD, and the TED. They are recorded in Table 26.4 below, with the most frequently found response placed at the top of the column.

Table 26.4

Open-ended Responses to “What should be the mission of my school?” (AUC, SIM, NAD, TED)

Australia Themes	%	Solomon Island Themes	%	NAD Themes	%	TED Themes	%
Work e.g., education	30	Preparation for eternity	28	Lead the children to Jesus	34	Help students get to know Jesus	60
Share the good news	26	Teach the good news	24	Education	26	To prepare students to be good citizens	51
Leading others to Jesus	25	Work, e.g., educate, help, etc.	21	Preparation for this world	21	Education for eternity	23
Christian environment	18	Lead people to Jesus	21	Service learning	20	Quality education	21
Representing God to others	15	Opportunity to represent Jesus	15	Eternity focus	20	No response	9
Help in becoming good citizens	11	Seventh-day Adventist	14	Share the good news	19		

Australia Themes	%	Solomon Island Themes	%	NAD Themes	%	TED Themes	%
Preparation for eternal life	7	Misunderstood the question	11	Christ-centred education	16		
Service	7	Values and difference	7	God's love	10		
No response	21	Provide a Christian environment	7	Community focus	5	No response/ don't know	9
		Serve others	5	Distinctly Adventist	4		
		No response	2	No response/ don't know	9		

Note on Table 26.3: The colour-coding used in Tables 26.4 and 26.5 is only represented in shades of grey in the printed version of the book. It is visible in the Kindle eBook version. The same colour has been used to identify similar themes between the data sets.

Participants answer Question 1 before they read any of the other possible goals of mission that are mentioned in other questions of the survey. Hence their answer to Question 1 usually reports their unprompted thoughts on what the mission of their school should be. That similar themes appear in data sets from the AUC, SIM, NAD, and TED teachers is all the more remarkable given their different ages, qualifications, and life experiences. For example, some form of providing a quality education is one of the top four unprompted responses, as is some wording that reflects the concept of leading their students to Jesus. Preparation for eternity is also a goal mentioned by the four disparate groups of teachers represented in Table 26.4.

Open-ended Responses to “What is different about an Adventist school?” (AUC, SIM, NAD, and TED)

The third question on the survey was an open-ended question, in which participants were asked: “My organisation is owned by or connected to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. If I were asked what makes it different from similar organisations that are NOT part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I would say: ...” These responses have been analysed by Sherene Hattingh for the SPD, the NAD, and the TED. They are recorded in Table 26.5 below, starting with the most frequently found response at the top of the column

Table 26.5

Open-ended Responses to “What is different about an Adventist school?” (AUC, SIM, NAD, TED)

Australia Theme	%	Solomon Island Themes	%	NAD Themes	%	TED Themes	%
Nothing/no response	44	Biblically based organisation	55	Integrate faith and learning	31	Christ-centred education	70
Christ centred	23	Seventh-day Adventist focus	38	Adventist affiliation	28	Pastoral care	30
Special character	16	Future focused	15	Nothing/no response	22	Big organisation	7
Seventh-day Adventist focus	13	Lifestyle and way of living	10	Committed staff	11	Nothing/No response	2
Nurturing environment	11	Nurturing environment	10	Emphasize growing a relationship with Jesus	11		
Staff commitment to the organisation and mission	9	Staff commitment to the organisation and mission	9	Broad base of support	10		
		Private independent organisation non-government	7	Educate whole child	7		
		Additional Christian focused activities	4	Caring tolerant family feel	5		
		Nothing/no response	6	Freedom to connect teaching with Biblical principles	5		
				Hope for the future	5		

The responses to Question 3 reveal that many teachers are uncertain about what is distinctive about an Adventist school when compared

to, say, a Lutheran or Catholic school. The most common teachers' response was that their schools are different because they provide a Christ-centred or a biblically based education. These are indeed commendable goals, but Christ-centred education is something that would be a goal espoused by all schools associated with a Christian denomination, and a biblical focus would be a goal that almost all Christian-focussed schools would find a worthy goal. Clearly an Adventist perspective is going to be unique, and the AUC, SIM and NAD teachers all reported this among their top-four responses. According to the analysis by Sherene Hattingh reported in Chapter 10 of this book and in Hattingh (2019), teachers explain this in terms of distinctive Adventist doctrines such as the Sabbath, or in the concept of the wholistic integration of the intellectual, spiritual, and physical in the student's experience. One of the results of the research reported here might be a recommendation to add workshops in professional developmental sessions for teachers in Adventist schools in which the potential distinctiveness of their school is discussed.

Conclusions

There are both similarities and differences in the age and educational profiles of the teachers in the AUC, SIM, NAD and TED, in their practices of personal piety such as prayer and reading Scripture, and of the emphasis teachers put on the goals that they think their schools should pursue as their mission. All of the teachers in all of the regions surveyed live exemplary spiritually-based lives, and are committed to provide a biblically based, Christ-centred education for their students that takes place within the parameters of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine, and which stresses the holistic nature of humankind.

The teachers work in different environments, which can depend on the Union in which they are located. Within the NAD, Adventist schools are staffed by SDA teachers who tend to have students in their classes from an SDA background. The Adventist school system established in the Conferences that now make up the AUC started from this premise. For many decades after the first establishment of Adventist schools in Australia, an Adventist school was defined as one that is staffed by teachers who are committed Seventh-day Adventists, who teach students who come largely from families with some association with the SDA Church. The combination of the static numbers of children from Adventist homes that are in attendance with the steady increase of students from non-SDA homes,

has changed this basic definition. An Adventist school in the AUC is now understood by ASA to be a school that is staffed mainly by teachers committed to the SDA Church, but who teach students who may come from an Adventist home, but mostly do not. They have redefined the role of the schools from protecting the children of Adventist parents from the snares of wider society (the “world”), to considering the schools as a bridge into the wider community, a place where the Church can represent itself— a place, even, of evangelism. It will be interesting to observe how ASA schools develop over the next few years. If current trends continue, the system of ASA will continue to expand with the influx of yet greater numbers of students who come from non-SDA homes. They will also struggle to recruit committed SDA teachers to meet the growing demand for teachers that will inevitably follow the expansion of Adventist schools. ASA is putting in place deliberate measures to ensure that its teaching staff, no matter their confessional background, are well grounded in the ethos of the Adventist school system. Presentations about Adventist ethos at professional development days and the increasing presence of chaplains in the schools are but two of these measures.

This chapter reflects on the data gathered from only three of the 13 Divisions of the world SDA Church. The research team is looking forward to more discoveries as more of the Divisions contribute survey data to the research project that is being conducted among employees of organisations that are owned by or affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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Education as Preparation for Eternity: Teachers in Seventh-day Adventist Schools in Australia and the Solomon Islands, and Their Perceptions of Mission

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